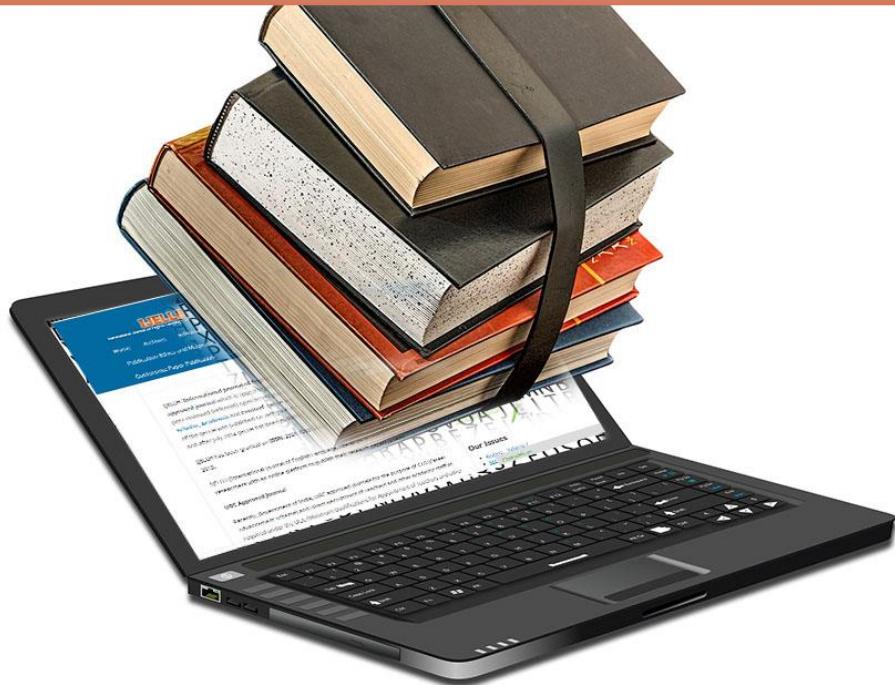


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Breaking The Chains: An Analysis Of Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*

Abstract

Deshpande is a towering figure who has highlighted the problems of women and their fettered identity in the patriarchal society. She has presented modern and forward looking women also in her novels struggling to attain their selfhood. Whereas her earlier two novels presented female characters with a cloistered self, who could not muster sufficient courage to resist the socio patriarchal chains but her next two novels, *The Binding Vine* (1993) and *A Matter Of Time* (1996) represent women with a different temperament that do not believe in silent suffering. This paper focuses on the evolution from silence to articulation in the form of resistance and protest by the mothers and more vehemently by the daughters. The significance of the articulation of male characters has also been analyzed. However, the major characters in this novel, like earlier novels, have been women who decide to speak out against the chauvinistic attitude, dogmatic mentality and the prejudiced notions of the male-centered world.

Keywords: identity, patriarchal, resistance, articulation, chauvinistic.

Urmila, the central protagonist in *The Binding Vine* and a college teacher, is different from the protagonists of the earlier novels in the sense that she is fully aware of women's confinement in the traditional setup and the uselessness of their monotonous existence within this oppressive sphere of silence from the very beginning. Hence, she is successfully able to come out of this vicious circle of suffocating silence and provide her support to other suffering women as well. The novel portrays such women characters who ultimately become upholder of a new generation. G.K. Bardiger observes that Shashi Deshpande's novels "are about Indian women, especially women with their fears, anxieties, agonies within the married framework of family life" (79). Critics opine that the women characters in Shashi Deshpande's novels find themselves placed in insecure and unstable family life and they live under the constant shadow of fear and anxiety. Mother-daughter relationship receives a new treatment here as the daughters try to think compassionately about their mother's position and condition. A scope of reconciliation between mother and daughter that leads to a unique kind of female bonding puts these novels in a different light than earlier novels.

The Binding Vine promises 'a new era' that begins with its main character Urmila, a college lecturer, who takes a step forward to break the age-old long silence imposed upon women. The earlier protagonists Jaya and Saru have already begun to question the traditional norms and have realized the need to assert their individuality. They become successful in figuring out the cause of their humiliation and servitude. Through their introspection of the past, they succeed in knowing about themselves but in a limited way. *The Binding Vine* may be seen as a work of literature amalgamating Deshpande's themes of previous novels into one 'broader, more intense canvas'. As Indira Nityanandam remarks, "*The Binding Vine* is a refreshing change from the first

three novels of Deshpande. Protest comes easily to her protagonists here and there is less agony..." (qtd in Prasad 145).

Deshpande, in the present novel, depicts a bond of love and companionship among women. Urmila, also called Urmii, succeeds in establishing a feeling of solidarity with other women who are victims of patriarchy. The novel beautifully shows how this feeling of sisterhood can help women to overcome their sense of loss, fear, and confusion. So, it can be said that the world that predominates in the novel is the world of women. As A.G. Khan says, "It's not that men are entirely absent, but they make their presence felt merely by the power they exercise over women, especially over their wives and daughters" (163). The male characters are depicted in minor roles, and they are either absent from the scene for long or dead in the story. Kishore, Urmila's husband, remains on tour due to his job in merchant navy. Urmii's father is no more. Kishore's father is also dead. So, most of the characters of men come to the fore through the memories of their wives and daughters. Six-year-old Kartik and Urmii's brother Amrut, Dr. Bhaskar are the only young males present in the novel.

The novel begins with Vanaa, Urmii's childhood friend, trying to console her and bring her back to normalcy after she suffers the loss of her 18 months old daughter Anu. Deshpande presents the readers with a character who instead of succumbing to this loss tries to come out of it on her own, knowing that she had another child, her son Karthik who needs her. She feels that this huge blow of fate is just one of the battles out of many that lie ahead in her life: "This is one battle I have to win if I am to go on living" (21). It is not easy for a mother to get over the enormity of such a circumstance. A child is a flesh and blood, a whole part of a mother. It is only the familial bond that

can pull one out of such deep misery that threatens to spill over at any time. In Urmī's words:

We are, all of us, groping our way towards normality- Whatever that normality is after a death in the family. But the effort is obvious- the sideways furtive glances at me, the sudden flurry of talk at the treat of a silence. Vanaa and Inni are like two actors, desperately keeping the show going. They try, without seeming too obvious, to include me in their conversation; but it swells and eddies about me, leaving me untouched. (28-29)

This sense of loss makes Urmila more sensitive to the pain of others. It is due to this heightened sensitivity only that she is able to befriend Shakutai, a rape victim Kalpana's mother when she meets her in the hospital that Vanaa works in. Urmī is very different from her earlier counterparts in the sense that she shows greater strength and positive outlook from the beginning of her journey and tries to energize other women as well. She is the master and controller of her own life. She has an enlarged consciousness that can understand the sufferings of others and empathize with them: “ ‘After Anu died... Then I saw Kalpana, I met Shakutai, I read Mira’s diary, her poems, And I’ve begun to think yes...’”(174).

The novel initiates us into a world where women outshine men regarding their determination to deal with adversities and their ability to establish solidarity among themselves to live a happy, peaceful life. The writer gives ample account of the trials and sufferings of lower sections of society represented by Kalpana, Sulu, and Shakutai. Through these women and others like Vanna, Mira, Akka, and Inni, Deshpande tries to bring out the challenges of motherhood, painful and undesirable sexual relationships;

hollowness and hopelessness of the institution of marriage, the horrid experience of the rape victim and hypocritical attitude of society towards a rape victim.

Urmi's journey towards this heightened sense of awareness and human bonding begins with reading Mira's diaries, which gives her a glance into the despair of a woman who was entrapped in a forced marriage. The writer makes a scathing attack on the institution of marriage that doesn't have a room for a woman's choice. Her emotions and feelings have no place in her husband's world. Mira was a beautiful and intelligent girl who had the creative potential to be a renowned poet, but these privileges do not grant her a liberal identity. Through Mira's unwillingness for a physical relationship with her husband, Deshpande portrays a man's obsession with his wife and her intense repulsion of physical intimacy with him. She becomes a victim of a marriage based on fear and develops: "an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married" (63). Her poems contain the essence of her innermost feelings and untold miseries due to the forced sexual activity imposed on her by her husband. She puts her heart out in the poem by showing how she bears the mutilation of her body and soul silently:

But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too

Twist brocade tassels round her fingers

And tremble, fearing the coming

Of the dark-clouded, engulfing night? (66)

Shashi Deshpande seems to be critical of the social notion that marriage permits a husband to fulfill his biological needs irrespective of wife's consent. She exposes the

ruthless functioning of this institution which sanctions heinous crime like marital rape. Regarding this Indrani Jaisingh, a lawyer says, “It is assumed that by marrying a man, a woman has given her consent to sexual intercourse with her husband at anytime. Thus, even if he forces himself on her, he is not committing an offence (of rape) as her consent is assumed” (qtd in Trivedi 147). Mira’s silence is taken as a consent by her husband who begins the task by pretending love but ends up in forced sexual assault: “‘Please’, he says, ‘please, I love you’. And over and over again until he has done,....” (67). All this tears her heart to the core and the very word ‘love’ becomes obnoxious for Mira: “Love! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing. I have learnt to say ‘no’ at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all” (67). So, it is not only a woman’s silence that emboldens a husband to force himself upon her, but her firm refusal also does not carry any meaning for him. Simone de Beauvoir’s observation validates this fact: “Marriage is obscene in principle in so far as it transforms into rights and duties those mutual relations which should be founded on a spontaneous urge; it gives an instrumental and therefore, degrading character to the two bodies in dooming them to know each other in their general aspect as bodies, not as persons” (463). In order to unburden herself from this suffering, Mira tries to find relief in writing poetry. Her uncertainty about being a woman poet is expressed in lines:

‘Huddled in my cocoon, a somnolent silk worm,

Will I emerge a beauteous being?

Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist?’ (65)

A male chauvinistic attitude towards a woman’s creativity is perceptible throughout the novel, even in the attitude of another poet Venu, who discourages her from writing with

such vanity: “ ‘Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men’” (127). Though Mira failed to achieve literary acclaim, but she uses her pen as a weapon to save herself from the tyranny and abuse of her husband. She registers her protest in one of her poems against the change of her name after marriage:

A glittering ring gliding on the rice

Carefully traced a name ‘Nirmala’.....

Can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira. (101)

Urmila understands her plight and her woes since she has read her poems deeply and even translated them into English. Mira just lived her life on the sustenance of her writings. It was her diary and notebooks that gave her some solace: “Perhaps it was her writing that kept her going, that kept her alive” (127). Mira’s unexpected death during child-birth ends her suffocating and loveless life with a man whom she detested.

Although she died a premature death, but she succeeded in conveying the loneliness, pain, and turmoil of an incompatible marriage through her creative genius to Urmila, who alone comes out triumphantly from the adverse circumstances of the marriage. Being a woman, she is successful in binding herself with the loveless life of Mira. She understands that for women like Mira, marriage is nothing less than a “dark clouded engulfing night” (66). Urmila’s decision to publish Mira’s poems meets with Vanaa’s cold attitude that it might bring shame to their family’s name, but Urmila is not afraid. Regarding Mira’s situation, Rashmi Gaur and Pallavi say, “Mira is reduced to a tongue tied valet de chamber. With the passage of time, the concept of submission

is inculcated in her. She is in an imbroglio surrounded by despair and devoid of the power of becoming an iconoclast" (222-223).

The novel gives an account of several tragedies in the life of different women and men. Vanaa's mother Akka is one such woman whose life has been shattered by patriarchal norms. She was forced by her family members to marry a widower who already had a son named Kishore. She was told that the man is marrying her only for the sake of his son. She was turned into a scapegoat just because she had crossed the marriageable age and had become 'unwanted' in her own house. Being a woman, Urmī was able to comprehend the pain and sufferings that Akka had undergone. Her tears are proof of the loneliness and alienation in her own married life. She is deprived of her basic marital rights, and her inability to voice her problems makes her life hell. And like her mother, Vanaa too fails to get filial love due to his father's preference for a son. She has to live a life of discrimination.

Shakutai's sister Sulu's case is not much different from Akka. She was very affectionate and caring woman and fully dexterous in the art of decoration and housekeeping, but her husband never recognized her efforts. Her fear of being thrown out in case she failed to give her husband a child, turned her into an alienated being: " 'After marriage she changed. She was frightened, always frightened. What if he doesn't like this, what if he wants that, what if he is angry with me, what if he throws me out ... ?'" (195). For women like Sulu marriage implies security and she is haunted by the fear of losing this security. The institution of marriage shatters her self-confidence. Prabhakar fails to see that she is also a human being of 'flesh and blood.' He refused to touch her due to her skin disease but allows her to cook and clean if she makes Kalpana marry him. Her acceptance of this decision shows her helplessness.

However, her sister Shakutai goes a step ahead in realizing the futility of surviving a rotten relationship. Her husband leaves for Bombay after marriage in search of livelihood but remains jobless after a futile wait of six months. She decides to work in order to support her children and drunkard husband, but, in spite of all these compromises, she feels shattered when her husband leaves her for the sake of a younger woman. It is then, that she realized the foolishness of clinging to her 'manglasutra' and 'sindoor' on her forehead: "Then one day I thought- the man himself is so worthless, why should I bother to have this thing made in precious gold? That's been the greatest misfortune of my life... marrying that man" (110). In spite of her desertion at the hands of her husband, Shakutai's children fail to sympathize with her. She recalls Kalpana's accusation: "You drove him away," she said, "you're always angry, always quarrelling, that's why he's gone" (93). Shakutai becomes an easy prey to the hypocritical society which holds a woman responsible for her desertion and even for the rape of her own daughter Kalpana: "What can you expect, they say, of a girl whose mother has left her husband?" (147).

Through the character of Shakutai, Deshpande tries to show that a woman does not have any option but to adhere to the 'constrictive and coercive authority' of patriarchal norms. The writer also wishes to assert that conflict and suffering in nuptial bond cuts across all sections of women and are not confined to a particular class or community. She does not encourage her women characters to break off marriage or family. They try to find solutions and possible cures through all available means. It is true that some of her woman characters are silent and submissive who consider it as their last resort but there are others who show indomitable will and determination to assert their individuality and construct their own identity within marriage.

Rape is not only an invasion of the female body, but it leaves an indelible mark of pain and bereavement on her psychology as well. Nivida Chandra and Girishwar Misra say that this type of 'love', "is narcissistic and uncaring. There is a lack of empathy and concern for the pain of the women they wed. They cannot look beyond their needs and satisfaction and the prize of ego gratification when they manage to overcome their women" (75). Shashi Deshpande deserves appreciation for dealing with an issue which has hitherto been pushed under the carpet. Neeru Tandon says in this context: "Rape as a form of personal violence is not merely a physical assault and symbolic of the degradation of psyche. It is infact, a conscious process of intimidation by which men keep all women in a state of fear" (63). Kalpana's refusal to marry his uncle, Prabhakar, a married man, instigates him to take revenge on her by raping her brutally. The whole act was so oppressive that she goes unconscious: "marks of his fingers on her arms where he had held her down. And there were huge contusions on her thighs- he must have pinned her down with his knees. And her lips-bitten and chewed" (88). Kalpana's rape shows the narrow mindset of people regarding a rape victim. Although Shakutai was a loving mother, she failed to resist these patriarchal notions and blamed Kalpana's independent spirit for her present condition: "Cover yourself decently, I kept telling her, men are like animals. But she went her way. You should have seen her walking out, head in the air, caring for nobody. It's all her fault, Urmila, all her fault..." (147).

Her social conditioning shapes Shakutai's attitude that a self-willed woman invites male's wrath and attention and in Kalpana's case, her fear came true. Shakutai doesn't want to file a police case, believing that if the matter is publicized, then it will create more difficulties: "But publicising it isn't going to do anyone any good. It's going

to be a trouble for everyone- the girl, her family, your colleague who first examined her, us" (89). She fears that making it public would also spoil the chances of the marriage of her daughter. That's why she registers this as a case of an accident which comes as a shock to Dr. Bhaskar and Urmila. The policeman's attitude towards the victim's sums up the callousness of the whole society: "She's going to die anyway, so what difference does it make whether, on paper, she dies the victim of an accident or rape?" (88).

Shakutai, herself a victim of torturous marriage, is worried not only about Kalpana's marriage but of her other daughter Sandhya as well. She has her own reasons to worry: " 'How can I not worry? I have to live with people, I have to live among them" (178). That's why she is least interested in registering a complaint and fighting for justice for her daughter. She says, "...what difference will it make now? Why report it? The only thing that will happen is that our name will be mud. I have these two girls..." (62). Urmila persistently urges Shakutai to register the case of rape so that the culprit gets arrested. She is not ready to take this indignity lightly and wants to report the matter to the officials, but Shakutai begs her not to do any such thing that might bring shame to her family. Urmila tries hard to make Shakutai understand that it is not Kalpana's fault: " 'She was hurt, she was injured, wronged by a man; she didn't do anything wrong. Why can't you see that? Are you blind? It's not her fault, no, not her fault at all'"(147). Urmila is shocked to see that everyone wants to close this matter so that the rapist can go scot free.

Urmila is Deshpande's first protagonist who decides to fight another woman's battles. Though she gets very little support from outside but she doesn't leave hope and decides to take the matter to the press with the help of her journalist friend Malcolm,

thinking that Kalpana might get justice. Soon, the issue gains public attention and government orders a fresh investigation. Shakutai is overwhelmed to receive so much solidarity from women's activists and says: " 'The whole world is my friend' (179). She comes out of her humiliating zone and becomes an accomplice in demanding justice for her raped daughter. The rapist Prabhakar is found guilty in the police investigation. Urmila emerges as a heroic figure who is fully aware of the injustices on women and wants to help everyone who comes in her contact. Her encouragement to Vanaa to be more 'self-willed' in life and not be just a door mat, her sympathies with poor Shakutai, her emotional bonding with Kalpana and Mira and her decision to publish her dead mother-in-law's poems are remarkable examples of female bonding. Urmila may be called the most rebellious of all Deshpande's heroines. Indira Nityanandham observes that: "The hope for Indian women lies in the happy fact that, though here are Miras and Kalpanas and Shakutais, we also have our Urmilas" (qtd in Prasad 145).

Urmila is not a pseudo-feminist like Preeti who appears to be shallow female opportunist without morality. She has a firm belief in the sanctity of marriage and can understand its significance in providing physical, emotional, and economical security to women. Harmmeet Jhajj writes, "Deshpande does not negate the institutions of marriage and family. She simply advocates a middle path which is to be chosen only after reclaiming your lost voice" (Jhajj 78). Having seen the plight of women like Sulu, Shakutai, and others, she feels herself blessed: "I've been lucky, that's all. While these women... They never had a chance." (174). This realization of being more fortunate filled her with a sense of purpose that she should use her freedom to help other women who are less fortunate than her. She develops an optimistic attitude towards life. She understands that though Anu has gone, but she has her son Karthik, who needs her. She

is now hopeful that one day Kishore will transcend his limitations and she will get a chance to understand him fully well. At last, she feels that relationships are based on love and hope. She says: "Each relationship, always imperfect, survives on hope" (141). Love works as a binding vine to a family: "The most important need is to love. From the moment of our births, we struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves to this strange world we find ourselves in. Only when we love do we find this anchor. But love makes you vulnerable" (137).

In her passion for sharing the sufferings of others, she forgets her pain, and becomes a voice of those who are silenced by societal norms. The real lesson of life is taught to her by Shakutai, when she says, "This is how life is for most of us, most of the time; we are absorbed in the daily routine of living. The main urge is always to survive" (203). This urge to survive does not let them succumb to their grief. Although, the novel depicts the monotony in people's lives but to overcome this monotonous feeling is the real victory.

The novel poignantly shows the plight of a working woman. However liberal or emancipated a woman might be; she is primarily expected to remain confined to the role of wife and mother only. Vanaa, Urmī's sister-in-law, is educated and working, yet her family expects her to be a good wife and a doting mother leaving no scope for her self-will and identity. Though being educated and aware, she never dared to challenge Harish's male chauvinism. She follows his orders unquestioningly. Although she expresses her frustration and anger in front of Urmī when Mandira blames her for not giving them time "... why is it nobody thinks of blaming Harish? He's never around, but it's never his fault" (75).

Vanaa's role clearly projects the problems faced by a working woman in the sense that, her traditional roles being intact, it has doubled her burden, sufferings, and frustrations. She does not get any help or support from her husband. Harish does not share household duties and has no regards for his wife's feelings. Vanaa remains unassertive in front of her husband. Though it goes to his credit that he does not exhibit any preference or necessity for a male child and like Sulu's husband, he doesn't blame his wife for not having a son. After the birth of their second daughter, he decides to have no more children, but Vanaa wants a son, and when Urmi asks Vanaa to express her desire in front of her husband, she says:

'I did. And he quoted population figures at me. And he said, one, surely I'm not the kind of woman who craves for sons, am I? And, two, what makes me think the next one will be a boy? He's right, only... I wouldn't have minded taking a chance.' (81)

So, he seems to be unaffected by the patriarchal belief that attaches too much importance to a son.

Like the marital relationship, the mother and daughter relationship also does not bring any respite to these women. Rinku Rani in her article says, "The analysis of her novels makes it clear that daughters are antagonistic towards their mothers because the mothers always force them into traditional traps. They push them into world of subjugation and submission willingly or unwillingly" (167). They feel that it is her mother who initiates her into this marital world where she has to relegate herself to a secondary position. But, here in this novel, daughters try to understand the experiences and struggles of their mothers and the relationship does not end with the same inimical

attitude towards each other. It is a well-known fact that daughters never consider their mothers as role models, but it is ironical that they fail to escape from the same roles of motherhood. When daughters themselves become mothers, all those fears, anxieties, expectations, weaknesses become a part of their being. The novel provides readers with five pairs of mother-daughter relationships: Urmi-Inni, Mira's mother-Mira, Shakutai-Kalpana, Akka-Vanaa, and Vanaa-Mandira.

Urmi's estrangement with her mother was deep-rooted in her separation from her mother at an early age, but Urmi never tries to reason out the cause of this displacement. She fails to understand that due to her mother's early marriage and motherhood, she could not handle Urmi properly: “ ‘I was frightened of you Urmi,’ I was too young, I was not prepared to have a child. And you were not easy, you used to cry all the time, I didn’t know how to soothe you...” (199). In addition to it, her mother was powerless in front of her domineering husband who decided to send Urmi to her paternal grandmother because he was not happy with Inni’s ways of raising his daughter. As she says; “ ‘Then he decided he would take you to his mother. He didn’t say anything to me, he just took you away... I begged him, Urmi, I cried,... Nothing could make him change him mind” (199-200). It is highly painful on the part of a mother to be separated from her child soon after birth. Although it was Urmi’s father who was instrumental in her displacement from her mother, but it was Inni who had to bear the resentment of her daughter, and this apathy between Inni and Urmi stayed throughout life. So, this insensitivity towards female gender is not born from the intellect, but from ingrained culture, a culture that favors this inequality. One should understand that nature has bestowed man and woman with certain attributes and they need to develop mutual respect and understanding towards each other. A father exerting

his authority over his wife leads to the imbibement of these traits in the son as well consciously or unconsciously. This is clear from the conversation between Urmī and her son-Amrut: “No, I don’t like men who try to dominate women. I don’t like women who do it to men, either. But yes, a man must be firm. Like Papa was...” (127). So, the domineering attitude of father and its tame acceptance by the submissive mother tends to become the upholder of this age-old patriarchal culture.

Similarly, Mira also considers her mother to be responsible for her unhappiness in married life. Mira was forced into an unwanted relationship by her family, while her vehement protests were rubbed off as mere ‘childish resistance.’ Even Mira’s mother could not intervene because she felt that: ““Nothing is in my hands””(126). This feeble and resigned attitude of her mother becomes the cause of the estrangement between mother and daughter. Mira fails to understand her mother’s dreams for her daughter and laments: “ ‘Why do you want me to repeat your history when you so despair of your own?’” (126). As a daughter, she never gets a chance to unburden her grief and sorrow in front of her mother: “She knew I was not happy, I know she knew it; but she was afraid to ask me, afraid I would admit it” (126).

The writer intends to depict the complexities in the life of mother and daughter, as both seem to be trapped in the conflict between tradition and modernity. The daughters fail to understand the socio-cultural conditioning of their mothers in being passive and submissive. The position of a mother becomes doubly marginalized- first because of their rights as mothers in the lives of their daughters and, second, ironically, from their daughters themselves. Deshpande effectively projects the dilemma of a modern woman who keeps oscillating between requirements of motherhood at home and desire to assert her autonomous being by doing work outside the home. This dual

responsibility of home and work becomes a high-risk factor between Vanaa as a medical social worker with long working hours and her duty towards her daughter Mandira. Mandira registers her protest against her mother, who left them in the surveillance of a maid: “ ‘I don’t want Hirabai, I want my mother’” (72). This anger and desperation due to her mother’s prolonged absence from home come out at the slightest provocation, and she complains: “You’re always making fun of me. You’re cruel. I’ll never talk to you again, never, never in my life...””(31). This deprivation of motherly love and care affects Mandira’s psyche to the extent that she confides in Urmī that she would never leave her children like her mother. It is true that both mothers and daughters often have idealistic expectations about their relationship. So, here again, Mandira fails to comprehend her mother’s compulsions in negotiating between family and career and the mother is completely unaware of her daughter’s need for love and motherly concern.

Deshpande tries to drive home the point that the women’s frustrations and disappointments are not limited to any single class or community. The relationship between Shakutai and Kalpana, who represent the working-class women, validates this point. The resentment between Kalpana and Shakutai begins even before Kalpana’s birth since Shakutai, due to her financial constraints, was not in a state of carrying a child: “I didn’t want the child, I didn’t want Kalpana, I wanted her to die”” (111). This unwanted pregnancy causes such strong psychological distress in her that she tried to hurt herself so that the child might get aborted. Such forced motherhood brings a sense of alienation in Shakutai’s life, and she remains unsure of her motherly duties throughout her life. She remains fearful of Kalpana’s security because if something happens to her, she will be blamed for her wrong parenting. She hates her daughter

being dressed up well or her using any cosmetics because she fears that it might attract male attention. As she says: "if you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they'll leave you alone?" (146).

Both mother and daughter have ideological clashes. Kalpana held her mother responsible for her own desertion due to her nagging behavior. Shakutai feels disturbed due to Kalpana's self-willed behavior and her lack of communication with her. She keeps complaining: "...she never tells me anything. She didn't even tell me how much her pay was, can you imagine that? Me, her own mother. As if I was going to take her money away from her!" (92). Shakutai is also pained to see that her daughter trusts her father more than her mother. She is unable to understand Kalpana's urge to live an independent life for herself. She wants a life very much different from the one that her mother was living.

So a strained relationship dominated by misconceptions and simmering ill feelings pervades through all mothers and daughters. The clash between mother and daughters symbolizes the clash between tradition and modernity. Their socio-cultural conditioning and prejudiced notions related to girl children do not allow them to develop harmony and compatibility in their relationship. Their daughters with modern sensibilities are not ready to sacrifice their life and individuality at the altar of stereotypical beliefs and prejudices. The daughters refuse to identify with their apparently passive mothers and live in a constant rage. Adrienne Rich says:

Many daughters live in rage at their mothers for having accepted, too readily and passively whatever comes. A mother's victimization does not merely humiliate her, it mutilates the daughter who watches her for clues as to what it

means to be a woman----The mother's self -hated and low expectations are the binding rags for the psyche of the daughter. (242)

Throughout the novel, we do not find a single trace of male hatred reflected in the novel. Urmila, 'The Binding Vine' also never desires a world without men. She respects Dr. Bhaskar who finds her as an individual with her own identity. He also admires her for her passion for truth and justice. Among all the male characters, Dr. Bhaskar Jain, a successful doctor with a great interest in music, is strikingly different from those who are aggressive, self-assertive and authoritative. He too is affected by patriarchal beliefs about marriage and thinks of marrying a "sweet, homely, fair, convent- educated girl"(160). When he comes to know that Urmi is a married woman, his attitude changes towards her, and he begins to behave coldly. Still, he helps Urmi in Kalpana's case and is surprised to hear Shakutai's views on rape. As compared to other males, he appears to be more humane and tries to understand the woman's condition in this harsh society.

In a patriarchal society, 'female sexuality' is an unheard phrase. Love and passion are always associated with male, as is evident from Mira's husband's behavior in *The Binding Vine*. He had seen Mira at a wedding and fell in love with her. He sent the marriage proposal to Mira's family through a mutual acquaintance. The proposal was accepted, and the marriage was settled against Mira's wishes. It was a victory of his manhood. For him, marriage is only about getting physical pleasure. Mira's husband was madly obsessed with her, and this sexual obsession of her husband created repulsion in Mira's heart. He never cared about his wife's desires or preferences and proved himself to be a brutal monster who continually ravishes her honor. Kishore, Urmi's husband, was born out of this forced relationship. Urmila's husband, Kishore, is shown absent throughout the novel. Urmi has to live alone at home for a few months

every year due to her husband's job in merchant navy. She has to struggle with her sexual desires also due to her husband's long absence. They loved each other since their teenage, and their longtime love has culminated into marriage. She loves her husband very deeply, but his long absence makes her very disappointed, lonely and empty. She has diverted her mind to her son and her upcoming daughter, but after her daughter's death she finds it very difficult to compromise with her sexual urges during Kishore's absence:

Then he goes away and I'm left with that passion. There was a time when I was frightened by the intensity of my bodily hungers for Kishore. It seemed to do nothing but complicate my life enormously. I often wished I could put my desires into a deep freeze and take them out, intact and whole, when he returned.

(164-165)

After the death of her daughter, she meets with Dr. Bhaskar Jain in the bereaved state of her mind. He gives her support, and she feels relaxed in his company, but Urmi's mother, Inni and her friend Vanaa are not happy with this relationship. They do not approve of their friendship: ““Urmi, you should realise he's serious about you. Have you heard him say your name? ‘Don't worry, Vanaa,’ I reassured her, seeing she was truly concerned. ‘I'm quite safe. I have my blade of grass’” (162).

Urmi tells them about ‘the blade of grass’ used by Sita in the mythological epic The Ramayana by Valmiki in Sundarkand. Sita uses the blade of glass between her and Demon's king Ravana. Likewise, Urmi also keeps a safe distance from Dr. Bhaskar. Dr. Bhasker shows his love for her, and she is initially drawn to him, but her strong conjugal bond prevents her from getting too close to him. She thinks, "It's so much

easier, so much simpler, to just think of virtue and chastity and being a good wife"(166). She turns down the proposal of Dr. Bhaskar Jain saying that "I love my husband and therefore I am an inviolate, chaste Sita" (164).

Although Urmī's marriage with Kishore was a love marriage, but later she finds it difficult to deal with her marriage with a person who comes into her life "a few months in a year and flits out again, leaving nothing of himself behind?"(164) Though she has a man of her choice in her life but she is not satisfied and feels rather trapped: " 'The two of us in a closed room,' ... 'and we can't get out. That's marriage'" (137). Kishore is educated and works in the Indian Merchant Navy as an officer, yet he is a conventional husband and does not understand her feelings of loneliness and emotional deprivation. Kishore tries to fill this void through sex but it is only a temporary answer to her painful loneliness.:

But sex is only a temporary answer... He was kneeling by me, his face close to mine, but the closeness was only physical... I could see the goose bumps on his shoulders, his chest. I did not look into his face, I was afraid of what I would see. I turned round and fell asleep. (139-140)

Kishore's face presents a detached look that stifles Urmī's feelings. When he is near to Urmī, he does not show any passion of love, and when he goes away, then his separation nearly kills her: "the parting is like death" (139). Their marriage does not give Urmī a mental satisfaction, and she craves for a constant bond of love and care with him. She comes to realize the emotional detachment from each other which makes her walk out of her nuptial bed for some time, only to be reunited later. J. P. Tripathi in *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande* under the title "*The Binding Vine and Indian Ethos*" says:

Urmila, the sailor's wife and college teacher, is more self-reliant and has an identity different from that of her husband; she is self-respecting and does not want to live on Kishore's money. She is, however, a sensitive vine and need Kishore as an oak to entwine herself around" (152).

It is true that Deshpande's novels appear to be women-centric, but she also presents a multifarious and accurate picture of men. She is deeply conscious of the role of socio-cultural forces on the life of men and women. Like women, men are also adversely affected by patriarchy, however, in a less painful way than women. Along with highlighting women's silence and oppression, her novels depict the frustrations and failures of male characters as well, who, in order to exhibit their masculinity, generally become aggressive and domineering. Deshpande tries to show that masculine and feminine traits have their own place and significance in the scheme of things. One cannot be degraded in order to uplift the other. Man and woman are incomplete without each other and hence dependent on each other. Neither men nor women alone can bring about a change in the society. It is only the mutual efforts by both that can bring about a 'new age.' Hence the call:

Come, my brothers, come, my sisters,

let us join our hands;

a new road, a new way

a new age begins.(44)

She desires for an ideal world where both the genders can live happily in a harmonious way. She has also made honest efforts to raise women's consciousness towards their

fellow beings, and this mutual recognition brings a sense of joy, peace strength and courage in their lives

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